

COMMENT

"Give light and the people will find their own way."

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TUESDAY, JULY 19, 2005

EDITORIAL

Campbell case illustrates importance of law

It's a multi-layered word, "justice." It means different things to different people, but behind the principle of justice stands our law enforcement personnel. They are the ones who stand between the citizens and lawlessness, the ones who track down criminals and bring them to court to face justice.

It is particularly disappointing when law enforcement personnel fail in their duty, fail the system, fail us.

The case of the five Campbell County deputies sentenced last week by U.S. District Court Judge Tom Varlan is a reminder that law enforcement officers are not — and should not be — above the law. The letter of the law is for us all.

The five deputies are Joshua Monday, Gerald David Webber Jr., Samuel R. Franklin, Shayne Green and William Carroll. They all pleaded guilty to charges they beat, tortured and threatened Lester Eugene Siler in a two-hour ordeal apparently intended to force Siler to sign a form giving consent to search his home.

Siler is not an innocent. He is a

convicted drug dealer, and when deputies went to his home last July, they were to serve him with a warrant for a violation of his probation. Campbell County prosecutors dropped charges filed against Siler by the deputies because of the violation of Siler's civil rights.

Whatever Siler is guilty of, he did not deserve to be beaten or tortured.

"The public depended on you to uphold our laws," Varlan said during one of the sentencing hearings. "Instead, you threatened, assaulted and intimidated."

It is inexcusable behavior for a law enforcement officer. "There was a proper way to go about that arrest that day," Varlan said.

The lawyers for some of the defendants argued that their clients had never received law enforcement training. While this might reflect poorly on the Campbell County Sheriff's Department, we do not believe it excuses the behavior of the men. A basic knowledge of right and wrong would have made last week's day in

court unnecessary.

We also think the sheriff's department has a responsibility in choosing the men and women it puts on the street to protect the county's citizens.

"To say that this man should not have been a police officer is a huge understatement," Varlan said about Carroll, who was identified as mentally challenged. "Quite frankly, it was disgraceful for the sheriff's department to put him out on the streets."

Was justice done last week in federal court, when these five men received sentences ranging from 51 months to six years?

We believe so. Assistant U.S. Attorney Charles Atchley clearly thinks so. "It was a very just result," he said. "I think it will send an effective message of deterrence to those who would do such a thing."

And we hope it is a reminder that no one in our society is above the law, that the basic tenets of right and wrong are indispensable in our justice system.

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- One third of a trillion dollars deficit is not good news. Bush already gave away the surplus with tax cuts for the rich and the war he wanted.
- The current Congress is not taking our national fiscal deficits seriously, leaving them up to someone to resolve.